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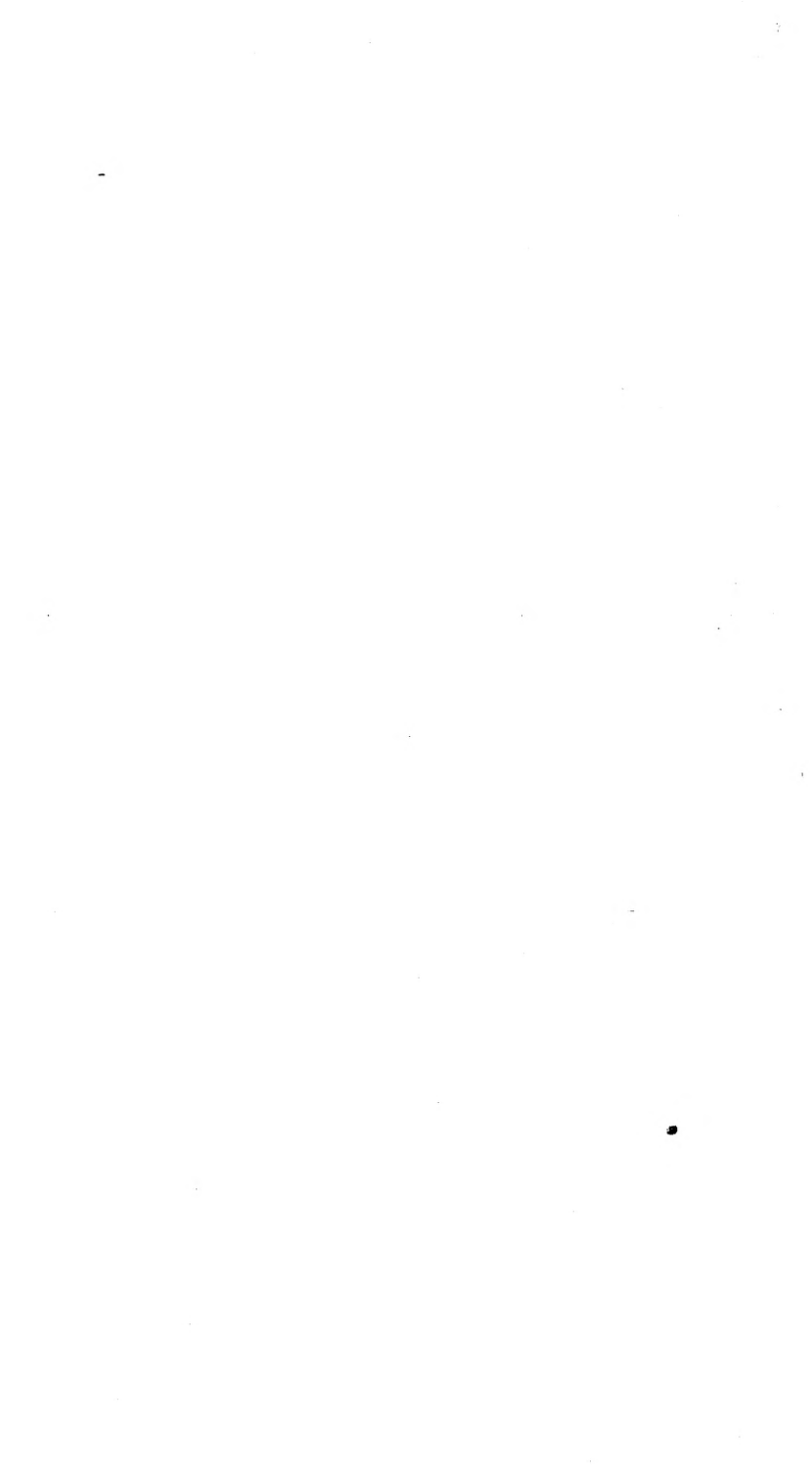
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L

I N A,

A T R A G E D Y ;

IN FIVE ACTS.

B Y M R S. W I L M O T.

Second Edition.

LONDON :

**PRINTED FOR JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET,
1815.**

PERSONS of the DRAMA.

CENULPH, <i>King of Wessex</i> . . .	MR. POPE.
EGBERT, <i>his Son</i>	MR. KEAN.
ALWYN, <i>Egbert's Friend</i> . . .	MR. J. WALLACK.
OSWALD	MR. WALDEGRAVE.
MORDRED	MR. COOKE.
1st LORD	MR. RAY.
2d Do.	MR. CARR.
3d Do.	MR. MADDOCKS.
BALDRED, <i>a crafty Monk, and</i> <i>Nephew to the King</i> . . .	} MR. RAE.
ORGAR	
OSRIC	MR. CROOKE.
PEASANT	MR. CHATTERLEY.
EDRED, <i>a Messenger</i>	MR. ELRINGTON.
MORCAR, <i>an Attendant</i> . . .	MR. EBSWORTH.
CHILD, <i>Son of Egbert and Ina</i> .	MISS GLEDHILL.
EDELFLADA, <i>Daughter of Ethel-</i> <i>bald, King of Mercia, and</i> <i>betrothed to Egbert</i> . . .	} MRS. GLOVER.
INA, (<i>secretly married to Egbert</i>) .	MRS. BARTLEY.
BERTHA, <i>Confidant of Edelfleda</i> .	MRS. BRERETON.
ALICE, {	MRS. SCOTT.
BLANCH, { <i>Attendants of Ina.</i> }	MISS COOKE.
<i>Messengers, Soldiers, Peasa</i>	

TIME—*The Eighth Century.*SCENE—*The Capital of the Kingdom of Wessex.*

PROLOGUE,

BY THE

HONOURABLE WILLIAM LAMB.

THE tragic Muse, in this our later age
Has seldom shed her influence on the stage.
With jealous eye, with cold disdainful mien
She turns away, and seems to claim the scene
For those, to whom her loftiest lays belong—
The mighty masters of her earlier song.
For her high thoughts, for her impassion'd strain,
For her proud crown, so often sought in vain,
To-night you hear a timid votress dare
Address an humble, yet ambitious prayer.
Say, should her powers beneath her task decline,
And sink unequal to the great design,
Yet can you from her aim your praise withhold,
Bold is that aim, but noble as 'tis bold.
As erst in Athens, mighty mother state
Of all that's lovely, as of all that's great,
The gifted bards, whose grave and simple song
Held high dominion o'er the list'ning throng,
Drew from their country's first heroic day
The wondrous subjects of their moral lay :
So, in that time, when nations, driv'n to roam,

PROLOGUE.

Had sought in this fair Isle another home,
And barbarous chiefs, where each had led his band,
Now sway'd divided empires in the land,
In that rude time, which gathering ages veil,
We fix the scene of our fictitious tale ;
Which seeks by natural passions to impart
A human interest to the human heart ;
A tale of secret love in generous youth,
Uncompromising honour, dauntless truth ;
Faith, which sore-tried nor change nor doubt can know,
And public danger mix'd with private woe.—
For, e'en amidst those dark and murderous times,
Religion's errors and ambition's crimes,
Athwart the gloom of that tempestuous day
The native spirit shot a splendid ray ;
The spirit of the land—whose course appears
Mark'd by its glory down the path of years,
Unalter'd still through every varying state
The lapse of ages and the turns of fate—
And late, when o'er us gleam'd the troubled air
With signs of woe and portents of despair,
The soul of Britain, tranquil and the same
Shone forth to all mankind a guiding flame ;
And if those times of toil must come once more,
If blasts again must rise, and thunders roar—
The beacon, brighter 'midst the gathering night,
Lifts high to heav'n its unextinguish'd light,
And, from the sacred Isles commanding steep
Streams life and safety o'er the labouring deep.

INA.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

A Garden.

EDELFLEDA. BERTHA.

Ber. My sovereign mistress, must I see thee
droop

In secret sadness, while thou chid'st the wish
Of faithful duty to partake thy griefs?
Thy earliest infancy my precious charge,
Thy opening bloom my aged bosom's pride;
Thou know'st how I have tended, watch'd, and
lov'd thee.

Edel. Forgive my wayward temper, dearest
Bertha;

And may'st thou never know the pang that forc'd
The peevish word which seem'd to chide thy love.

Ber. Alas! my princess, double is the wrong
To own a pang, nor share it with thy Bertha.

Edel. (*embarrassed.*) What have I said? Oh!
there are pangs that shun

All fellowship. Grief utters its complaint,
And finds a sweetness in its gushing tears;
But this!——

Ber. Oh heaven! thou speak'st as tho' remorse
Had stung thy bosom. Say, what can thy youth,
Thy innocence——

Edel. Peace, Bertha, peace! remorse
Were *his*, more justly, who inflicts the ill.
Wrongs undeserv'd, and borne in silence, wake

No conscious blush. The weak complaint alone
(By pride disown'd) might crimson o'er my cheek.

Ber. If breath'd to *me*? To *me*, whose raptur'd ear

Drank the first half-form'd accents of thy tongue.

Edel. Spare me, my friend, nor farther press
thy suit:

Have I not ills enough that thou may'st share?

This hated court is Edelfleda's prison;

Not the gay scene of her fam'd beauty's triumph.

But Mercia's king, the valiant Ethelbald,

Will free his daughter, and avenge her wrongs!

Restore her to her country—to her honours—

To all restore her, save to happiness!

Neglected! scorn'd!

Ber. By whom neglected, scorn'd?

Edel. (*embarrassed.*) The king! his nobles!

Ber. The king loves—honours thee;

Already, princess, holds thee as his daughter,

Whom a few days will make Prince Egbert's wife.

Edel. Prince Egbert's wife? Oh! never, never,
Bertha.

Why hast thou touch'd that string?

Ber. I thought no ill.

Came you not to this court betroth'd to him?

And gaily came, a joyful, willing bride?

Is not Prince Egbert knighthood's fairest flower?

Edel. Too sure, I came; gay, thoughtless,
young, and free;

And, oh! too surely, he is all thou say'st:

Nay, far beyond *thy* fancy's reach endow'd!

Ber. Thy speech is still at variance with itself.

Edel. 'Tis but the picture of the strife within.

Ber. My child! these dreadful words of
mystery

Fill all my soul with terror. I adjure thee,

By my long services, my faithful duty,
Speak thy full heart.

Edel. (*after a conflict.*) Bertha, *me* he loves not.
Oh! spare a princess' pride, and guess the rest.

Ber. Heaven shield thee! would'st thou say
he loves another?

Nay, think it not: she has been long remov'd.

Edel. I nam'd her not. Ha! then thou
know'st it, Bertha!

Or had'st not glanc'd at *her*. 'Thou know'st it;
speak,

Oh! tell me all; it is too late to hide it.

Ber. Indeed I nothing *know*—believe me,
nothing:

The idle rumours of an idle court—
Should they arrest our thoughts?

Edel. What idle rumours?

And am I then the jest o' the idle court?

Do they point at me as I pass, and say

'Tis *she*! 'tis the neglected Edel fleda!

Ber. Be calm, my princess; see the holy
Baldred:

You did yourself request his presence.

Enter BALDRED.

Edel. (*resuming a dignified manner.*) Father,
You are welcome. I would claim a service,
For sudden purposing to leave a court
Where I have long resided, while the duty
A daughter owes a father—

Bald. Can it be

That Edel fleda leaves the court of Wessex,
When all the palace, all the city, hails
With gratulation her approaching nuptials?

Edel. (*haughtily.*) Softly, good Baldred. Learn
that Mercia's princess

Is not so slightly won, nor gives her hand
As to the careless boor the village maid,
Willing ere woo'd, or rudely woo'd at best.

Bald. (sarcastically.) Ill would the faltering
phrase, the humble sigh,
Become the lip accusom'd to command !
Would'st thou Prince Egbert, *he* so grac'd by
fortune,
Should bear himself as common lovers use ?

Edel. I heed not how the prince may bear
himself.

Go, Baldred ; plead his cause in other ears,
Where it may more import. What may concern
My honour, is my sole, my proper care.
I claim no service of your courtesy,
Save to make known, e'en now, to royal Cenulph,
My purpose to return to Mercia's court.

[*Exeunt* EDEL. and BER.]

Bald. (alone.) And is it so ? And will she
sacrifice

To pride, her passion for detested Egbert ?
This may work mischief to the man I hate.
All kindly feelings from my breast I banish'd,
When, in disgust and bitterness of soul,
O'er my deep festering wounds I flung this garb.
It was for Egbert fortune slighted me !
Ere he had grasp'd a sword, I led the battle !
When lo ! he comes a meteor in men's eyes—
Draws in his glittering train my soldiers' hearts—
I woo'd fair Ina, and was paid with scorn :
While Egbert—curses on him ! by fair deeds—
Ha ! did I call them so ? Was't a fair deed
To woo the maid, whose charms had fir'd my
breast ?

Though now to hate be turn'd the love I bore her,
My bosom holds remembrance of the offence,

Enter an ATTENDANT.

Att. 'The king demands your presence, holy
father,
On matters of high import.

Bald. I attend.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

CENULPH and LORDS.

Cen. The times indeed do wear a fearful aspect.
You, noble Oswald, Mordred, Alwyn, Orgar,
Have shar'd my counsels with the holy Baldred;
And ever, when the reeling state has rock'd.
As the toss'd bark, stemming th' opposing surge,
Your long experience, and your steady hand,
Have brought her safe to port. We have advices
That Ethelbald has arm'd, but yet declares not
His hostile purpose; still in martial shews
Breathing his powers: as 'twere the boar enchain'd,
That whets his hideous tusks, and wounds the soil,
Rooting up herb and flower.

Osw. My gracious Liege,
And can you doubt the purpose of proud
Mercia?

Have not of late more frequent messengers
Sped with unwonted diligence 'twixt him
And his fair daughter? 'nay, who has not mark'd
The princess' alter'd mien—the quick succession
Of fierce conflicting passions on her brow.
The day is not yet fix'd that gives her hand
To Cenulph's royal heir. The people murmur,
That thus the pledge of peace with Ethelbald,
Should still on vain pretences be deferr'd.

Cen. Oswald, thou pointest to my sorrow's
source.

My friends, ye know Prince Egbert's ardent
temper,
In childhood haply foster'd by indulgence.

Alw. We do, my Liege; but his impatient spirit
Is coupled with such warm, heart-winning frank-
ness,

Such all-embracing kindness, it but seems
The larger bounty of more lib'ral nature.

Wor. A father or a friend may see it thus,
But it is dangerous.—To this we owe,
(This spirit so impatient of controul,)
That we are threaten'd by dread Ethelbald.

Cen. We sheath'd the sword, my friends, and
Edelfleda

Came to our court—the pledge of mutual love
Betwixt two nations harass'd by long war.
Betroth'd to Egbert, all a mother's care,
From my good Editha, the princess shar'd.
The general sorrow, while my poor queen lan-
guish'd,

And her lamented death, forbade the nuptials.
Meantime—(Ah! woe to me that e'er I foster'd
That serpent in my easy bosom) Ina,
The orphan daughter of brave Sigiswold——

Osw. My Liege, remov'd you not the lovely
mischief?

Forbidding her the court and festive pageants,
Ere yet the prince enthrall'd——

Cen. Such was my hope;
And—for I thought by glory's nobler flame
Eclips'd, the idle torch of Love might fade,
I sent my Egbert to command the force
Rais'd to repel the inroads on our borders.
Whether it be, that all on martial deeds

His soul intent, he spurn inglorious ease,
 Or that this Ina still may haunt his fancy,
 The court he shuns, and its gay soft delights;
 And late, when at the tournament, proclaim'd
 In honour of the beauteous Edelfleda,
 He bore the prize from all the knights of name,
 Neglectful of the princess,—at her feet
 He plac'd nor sword nor trophy,—but abrupt
 Broke from the lists, unmindful and discourte-
 ous,

To roam apart from all,—I know not whither.

Mor. Justly the haughty princess is offended.

Enter BALDRED.

Bal. My Liege, I come from Edelfleda's presence,

A messenger unwilling—to declare
 Her sudden purpose, ere the nuptial rites
 Have seal'd the bond of union 'twixt the states,
 To seek her father's court.

Osw. My sovereign Lord!

The public weal at stake—

Mor. Prevent her purpose—

Delay not, sire, to solemnize the nuptials.

Cen. But *she* must first be sooth'd.—

Osw. The prince alone

Can bend her proud neck to the gentle yoke
 She would be woo'd to wear.—

Cen. Retire, my friends,—

Alwyn, find thou my son. Thou know'st his
 haunts.

Command him to my presence in my closet.

I must be firm—my crown, my honour, all

Must be secur'd this day by his obedience.

I have too long been passive.—Mark me, Alwyn,
 For thou dost hold, I know, the master key

That locks his inmost counsel ; nay, with voice
 Of soft persuasion, while thou seem'st to yield,
 Dost bend his lofty spirit to thy reason :
 See that he come dispos'd to do my pleasure.
 It is *the King* who will confer with him.
 Tell him he has too long abus'd *the father*.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE III.

Ina's Bower.

EGBERT and INA.

Egb. Oh, yes ! I was indeed to blame, my love.
 Too much I yielded to the timid counsel
 Of cautious Alwyn.

Ina. Thou wast not to blame.
 Thy mother's fondness, and her sov'reign sway
 O'er thy kind father's heart ;—her care for me,
 The orphan daughter of her earliest friend——

Egb. And thy brave father, too, whose loyal
 breast
 Receiv'd the dagger aim'd at Cenulph's life——

Ina. And at his feet expired !

Egb. Oh ! these were hopes
 And claims, that sanction'd well the confidence
 With which I snatch'd thee to my beating bosom,
 Call'd thee my wife ! my dear, my honour'd wife !
 And swore that thou should'st be ere long ac-
 knowledg'd
 By Cenulph, his throne's heiress, and his
 daughter.

Ina. Thou could'st not then foresee that cruel
 death

Would rob us of the queen, and our best hopes.

Egb. But that I did respect my father's sorrow,
 I then had, spite of Alwyn, at his feet,

Told all my love,—confess'd my fault—my fault?
Ha! said I, *fault* to love such excellence?

Ina. (*starting.*) Methought I heard approaching
steps: each sound
Appals me, since I live a sad recluse,
With thoughts—tho' not of guilt—that shun the
light.

Egb. This is my worst reproach!—That vir-
tue's self
Should be by me condemn'd to own the fears
Which only guilt should know.

Enter ALWYN.

Ina. It is kind Alwyn:
Welcome, my friend. Oh! sooth his troubled
mind,

That dwells with too much pain on our lost hopes.

Alw. Alas! I am the bearer of worse pain.
Ye have heard that Ethelbald has taken arms—
The offended princess past all hope estrang'd.—
The king, awaken'd by th' indignant lords,
And by the peoples' murmurs, which have
reach'd

At length his careless ear, in angry mood,
Has sent me to command you to his presence,
To press,—I fear—with Edelfleda——

Egb. Peace!
'Twere sacrilege to utter such a thought
As now hangs on thy lip.—

Ina. My much-lov'd lord!
Oh! hear, good Alywn: hear him patiently.—
Too long we fondly from our thoughts have
driven

The frightful future in our present bliss.

Egb. And would'st thou I should hear him bid
me wed

With Edelfleda?—Cast *thee* from me?—*thee*!
By every holy tie my wedded wife!

Alw. But by the laws, alas! and king not sanction'd!

Egb. Can human laws o'ermaster the divine?
Tear from a mother's breast her infant joy,
And bid a father's heart not own his child?
Can a king's breath annul the thing that is?

Ina. Be calm, my Egbert! oh! it is not thus
By eager words of fruitless controversy
We can avert the ill, or find the means
To reconcile our duty and our love.
I will retire, and leave thee with our friend:
Yes, my lov'd lord! true friendship has more
skill

To work our good than our self-blinded judgment.
It knows not passion—for it takes the soul
Out of the earthy mould where passion lurks,
To watch,—a guardian spirit,—o'er the weal
Of its true object: as the sun it shines
For others' good!—still giving, without thought
Of like return! so high! so pure! so bounteous!
Oh! I do think kind angels lend to friendship
Some touch of their divinity, to raise
Th' aspiring thought to heavenly harmony!

[*Exit.*

Egb. (*gazing after her.*) She is herself that
heaven of harmony!

Oh! Alwyn! blest in Ina's love, thy friend
Is lost to life's low cares.

Alw. Too true, my prince;
In voluntary blindness thou hast pass'd
Thy thoughtless days of visionary bliss;
But I must rudely rouse thee from thy trance,
And bid thee look, with eye firm fix'd, e'en now
On all the fearful truth.

Egb. Speak on.—I am calm.

Alw. The king expects thee. He will press
thy marriage

With Edel fleda.

Egb. Alwyn, were I not

To Ina bound by ties so dear, so sacred—

Oh! no—I could not think of Edel fleda

But as a sister. To her father's court

I went a stripling, ere the feud arose

That sever'd us, and plung'd the states in war.

In th' op'ning splendour of her awful beauty

I honour'd her with boyish reverence,

As the bright sample of some airy world;

I ne'er had lov'd her as my dearer self!

As my heaven-destin'd partner! as my Ina!

Alw. The princess' self, with jealous anger
fir'd,

Will spare thee the ungrateful task to say

'Tis *thou* who dost reject her. Her proud spirit

Will scorn the hand but offer'd as the bond

Of union 'twixt the states. Meantime, the troops

On the fresh news that Ethelbald has arm'd,

With clamorous voice demand thee as their leader.

Thus we gain time—and sure the pitying heavens

Will look on so much virtue, so much love—

And turn aside the storm that threatens them.

Egb. Yes, thou hast shewn our last remaining
hope!

Proud Edel fleda will disdain my hand!

Oh! thou art all my comfort, all my stay;

I will in all be guided by thy prudence.

[*Exeunt.*

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

A C T II.

SCENE I.

CENULPH, OSWALD, &c.

Cen. And has a king no friend? Would no one tell

What, it seems, *all* or knew or did suspect?
And have his secret visits been so frequent
To this abandon'd woman? Artful fiend!
Well might she meekly thus retire content,
And shun the public gaze, as I commanded;
When, at her feet, all languishing with love,
Lay Cenulph's son, the heir of Wessex' throne!
Ye all have been in league—are traitors all!

Osw. My Liege, you wrong our faith. It is
but now

I learn what I have given to your ear.

Cen. By night, say'st thou, he from the camp
would steal?

Osw. Ev'n so, my Liege. When, in the crimson
west,

Mantled in blushing clouds, the sun went down,
Each order given, the prince would mount his
steed;

Swift as the winds, and as direct his course,
He topp'd the mountain, skimm'd the valley,
plung'd

Into the foaming river, stemm'd the current,
And reach'd the bower where Ina waited him;
Then, ere the grey light streak'd the eastern sky,
With course as rapid, he regain'd the camp.

Cen. Perdition seize the sorceress! That the child
Of Sigiswold, my youth's first friend, in age
My counsellor—who in th' extreme of peril
Gave me his life—

Osw. He only gave, my Liege,
What was already yours.

Cen. Peace, flatterer!
Had I my subjects' lives so rated, think'st thou
I e'er had own'd a friend like Sigiswold.

Enter ALWYN.

Alw. Prince Egbert waits, my Liege. May I
advise,—

May I beseech your grace, assail the prince
With gentle speech. Howe'er his spirit rage
Beneath the iron curb of harsh controul,
His heart will answer every tender touch
With readiest sympathy. He cannot see
Wrong on the brute inflicted, and restrain
The tear that swells for his mute suffering.

Cen. What would'st thou I should say? He
must, he shall,
This very day, espouse fair Edelfleda.

Osw. Nay, my good lord. She too must now
be won
To give her hand; but that would cost small pains
To Egbert's self, might he be brought to wish it.
'Tis to this end I would that you urge home
To his warm, generous nature, all the ruin,
Dishonour to your crown—the thousand mischiefs
That hang on his refusal, till his heart
Embrace *our* cause, forgetful of its *own*.

Cen. I hear his steps—away—I will suppress
My anger, Oswald, and will touch each string
That readiest vibrates in the generous breast.

Attend the princess hither. She requests
A private audience. I will work him to it;
And, ere he cool, she shall herself appear,
And make him all her own.

[*Exit* OSWALD.]

Enter EGBERT and ALWYN.

Egb. (*to Alwyn.*) For the first time
I meet his angry brow.

Cen. Approach, my son.
Sit thou beside me. I am old, and worn
By a long reign of war—of cruel bloodshed,
It was not mine t' avert. The throne I fill
Will soon be thine, and I would know from thee
Thy thoughts of the high office.

Egb. Oh! my father!
As yet unknowing but of martial rule,
To rouse, direct, or quell the soldier's rage—
Of *thee* I hope to learn each exercise
Of peaceful government.

Cen. And dost thou think
To learn of me to hold the throne of Wessex,
But as a larger means to do thy pleasure?
To hold the people but as flocks, nor care
How many swell th' account of them that bleed,
If but thy giddy passions be indulg'd?

Egb. How should I learn of thee these tyrant
maxims;
Thou, who hast ever sought thy peoples' good?

Cen. If such has been the measure of *my* sway,
How much must wiser Egbert scorn his father?
Egbert, who rather would unbar the gates,
And hail, with impious welcome, the invader,
Than aught controul his idlest appetite.

Egb. No, my lov'd father; I would give my
life

To save thy simplest peasantry from ill.
 Oh! let me prove it in the field of glory,
 And pour forth all my blood!

Cen. Go to, rash boy;
 'Tis not thy blood thy country asks of thee:
 'Tis not thy blood can make thy father happy:
 No, if thou hadst but entertain'd such thoughts
 As suit thy royal birth, thou hadst ere this
 Assur'd our peoples' welfare and thine own.
 Now 'tis too late, the sword is drawn, that dooms
 Thousands to pay the forfeit of thy fault,
 While thou wilt, thoughtless, revel in light joys
 I blush to think upon!

Egb. (*much affected.*) Oh, Alwyn, Alwyn!

Cen. A princess mock'd by nuptials vainly
 promis'd
 My name, my crown, branded with foul dis-
 honour!

I shall not long survive this sum of ill,
 Thus parricide will heap the monstrous measure
 Of thy licentious deeds!—

Egb. (*terrified.*) Most horrible!
 Are there no means? oh, point the way, my father,
 To thy unworthy son. Let me alone
 Meet the uplifted sword of Ethelbald,
 And free thy people from the threat'ning foe;
 Nor from a subject's veins one precious drop
 Distain the peaceful soil.—

Cen. It is well said.—
 Insult a princess,—break her generous heart;—
 And murder then her father.—

Egb. (*clasping his hands.*) Wretch accurs'd!
 Am I so deep in guilt?

Cen. (*taking his hand kindly.*) Not yet my son;
 But such the course thou headlong dost pursue.

Egb. (*eagerly.*) Not yet? and is there time?
 oh! then thy son

Will act a worthier part.

Cen. Why, this is well.—

The princess owns a generous soul, and will—

Egb. I know her generous! and the generous
nature

Will readiest melt in sympathy.—I'll seek

The noble Edelfleda—at her feet

Will pour forth all my soul!

[*Enter EDELFLEDA and BERTHA, escorted by
OSWALD, who retires.*]

Edel. (*aside to Bertha.*) Oh, heaven! my Bertha,
May I believe my senses? have I wrong'd him?

Cen. (*to Edelfleda.*) Thou, unawares, hast heard
my son declare

What a rude soldier's plain unpractis'd tongue,
Aw'd by thy charms, had ill express'd to thee.

Ber. (*aside to Edelfleda.*) Be firm, and claim
a royal escort hence.--

The fear to lose thee will unlock his lips.

Edel. (*watching Egbert.*) Royal Cenulph! I
but claim'd your patience

To ask such escort—as becomes—my state,—
Unto my father's capital—in—Mercia:

This was my errand—nor thought I to meet
One—almost—grown a stranger—in this pre-
sence.

Cen. Doubtless, fair princess, if it be thy wish
Thy native court to visit, and thy father,
When the new season smiles with happy omen,
Thou shalt have royal escort, as befits us,
And love shall guide thee, Hymen light thy way,—
Meet convoy for the beauteous Edelfleda,
And mine and Mercia's daughter!

Edel. Royal sir,
As Mercia's daughter *only* must I go,

Nor can as *Mercia's* daughter brook delay.
I claim no other title.

Alw. (*aside to Egbert.*) Mark her speech—
Firm to reject thy hand.

Egb. (*aside to Alwyn.*) Oh ! it is vain,
Alwyn, to combat thus with stronger nature ;
I cannot play the part thy caution prompts.

Alw. Think of thy *Ina*, and, oh ! think, thy
rashness
Might bring the royal vengeance on her head.

Egb. That name ! oh ! guide me,—guide me as
thou wilt—

What shall I say to shield her precious head ?

Alw. Speak gentle words as you were well
dispos'd

To satisfy the high demands of state.

Cen. (*who has been talking apart with EDEL-
FLEDA.*) Thy father pleads in vain : speak
thou, my son.

Thou may'st prevail on filial love, perhaps,
(Though much I honour this its pious wish,)
Awhile to yield its claim to claims more sweet,
And yet more powerful.

Egb. (*much embarrassed.*) Fair *Edelfleda* !
Thou know'st our youth, contracted by our
fathers ;

Ere yet our hearts had spoken, we were doom'd
By Hymen's bonds to ratify the peace
Betwixt two war-worn nations.

Edel. Oh ! sad lot
Of royal slaves, who thus are bought and sold !
But no, Prince *Egbert* ; no, it was not so ;
Our fathers barter'd our young hearts. Reason
Approves that I—esteem thy virtues—and—

Egb. And bids *me* honour thee, for thou art
noble !

Nor though the axe were lifted o'er my head,
 Could I one moment longer, by feign'd words,
 Abuse thy generous temper. Hence, base art!
 Dissimulation, hence! Speak nature! truth!

[throwing himself at her feet.]

See, princess, at thy feet a wretched man,
 Bow'd to the level of the peasant swain,
 Who trembles for the lowly roof that shelters
 His wife and little ones!

Cen. What mean thy words?

Egb. *(with dignity, rising.)* I am, like him, a
 husband and a father!

[EDELFLÉDA sinks into BERTHA'S arms.]

Cen. Dar'st thou avow it?—Ha! rash youth,
 beware!

Thou art a subject still, nor could'st thou pledge
 Thy faith, unsanction'd by thy king! thy father!
 My royal word was given to Ethelbald.

Set'st thou at nought the honour of my crown?

Egb. King! there are ties of nature stronger far
 Than even those convention has stamp'd sacred
 'Twixt man and man, by social compact bound.
 The rudest savage, howling amid deserts,
 That tears his vanquish'd foe, devours his flesh,
 And quaffs his smoking blood, does yet defend
 His mate, the mother of his babes, with wild
 And desperate love; and meekest things that
 creep,

Or wing the air, in nature's dearest cause
 Will brave destruction from the spoiler's rage.
 I am a husband, king! I am a father!

Cen. Thou art a traitor!

Alw. *(aside to Egbert.)* Oh! my royal friend,
 Thy impetuous feelings—thy imprudent words—
 Will bring destruction.

Cen. Guards! secure that traitor.

Alw. (aside.) Who now will shield poor Ina?

Egb. I!—I will!

(To the Guards.) Off, sirs! First take my life!
(The Guards fall back.)

Alw. Oh! yield, dear prince!
 Yield, if the life of Ina yet be precious!

Egb. My Ina! for thy sake—

(Gives his sword to the Guards.)

Sirs! take my sword!

And now my chains!

(The Guards approach fearfully and reluctantly to chain him.)

Cen. Why tremble ye? Obey.

Edel. (recovering.) Monarch! grown hoary in
 deceit and fraud!

Leagu'd with thy worthless son to insult me thus!
 Ye shall for this feel Ethelbald's dread arm.

Hurl'd from your throne, and prostrate at his feet,

Shall sue in vain for mercy, while your cries,

The cries of Ina—ev'n her infant's cries—

Shall fall as sweetest music on my ear.

Ev'n now great Ethelbald is on your borders;

'Twas *I* unsheath'd his sword! 'Tis *I* who
 guide it!

And none but *I* can turn its edge aside!

[Exit with BERTHA.]

Cen. (to Egbert.) Thus, wretch accurs'd! is this
 devoted land,

Her wounds scarce clos'd, and scarce renew'd
 her strength,

By thee to war's fell demons given again;

Nor though th' abandon'd, the perfidious Ina,

Were doom'd to pay the forfeit of her crime,

By deep disgrace, by death in lingering torments—

Egb. Ha! torments? lingering torments,
 said'st thou, tyrant?

But heaven's own angels watch o'er innocence !
 Nor can there be conceal'd in human shape
 The fiend could touch her with a hand of harm !
 The most remorseless villain, bred to blood,
 Fierce creature of thy fiercer will, would shrink
 At sight of Ina, in the majesty
 Of virtue, beauty, youth, distress !

Cen. Away !

Guards ! drag him hence. Ha ! Osric in such
 haste !

Enter OSRIC.

Osric. My Liege, with rapid march the King
 of Mercia

Advances on thy frontier. Deadly his rage !
 His powers, the breathless messengers declare,
 Rush as a torrent with impetuous course
 On the devoted land. No order taken,
 Confusion and dark mutiny prevail
 Among our troops. The surly soldiers, mur-
 muring,
 Demand Prince Egbert at their head.

Cen. Prince Egbert ?

What ? To a traitor shall I trust my cause ?

Osric. Such confidence in him each soldier
 feels,

Such love, such loyalty. I know it well,
 They will fall off, or coldly meet the foe,
 If any other leader——

Cen. Is it so ?

Then is it time I yield my forfeit sceptre,
 Lest he with impious hand should wrest it from
 me !

(*He throws down his sceptre.*)

Guards, free the man who henceforth is your king,
 And do with me as does the graceless churl,

Who lays the axe remorseless to the oak,
That stretch'd its sheltering arms o'er his fore-
fathers,

When wintry winds have stript its leafy pride.

Egb. (rushing to him with passionate tenderness.)

See me, my honour'd father, at thy feet!

Oh speak not words that cut my heart asunder!

Resume thy honours,—

[Giving him the sceptre.]

See thy humblest subject!

Oh shew some signs of pardon and of comfort,

That I may say thy son—thy penitent son.—

Yes trust thy cause to me—to thee I trust

All that my soul holds dear—my wife! my
child!

*[After a pause taking his hand with great
emotion.]*

If I should fall, they will be dear to thee.—

Cen. Oh Egbert, Egbert! thou go'st near to
break

Thy father's heart! this sudden flood of ill,

Pour'd from all sides on my devoted head

O'erwhelms me quite.—Well, since it must be so,

Prepare thee for command:

[With suspicion.]

I will not think

Thou yet hast practis'd aught disloyal, prince,

Save what I charge to wild unbridled youth.

We will confer again ere thou take horse.

Alwyn, thy arm.

*[EGBERT offers his assistance, and CENULPH
puts him away.]* Nay, I would be alone.

[Exit with Alwyn.]

Egb. 'Tis Alwyn's arm supports him—not his
son's!

Alas! this keen rebuke is just, my father:

Yet dost thou trust me; and thy confidence,
So precious, shall be justified by service
Thou look'st not for at my unworthy hands.

Re-enter ALWYN.

Alw. My royal friend—I tremble but to think
Of thy imprudence.—How avert the ills—

Egb. Alwyn, no ill awaits the upright course!
This dark concealment! 'twas the only stain
My bosom knew.—Oh! could'st thou guess the
load

It has thrown off! how buoyant all is *here*!
Avert what ill? for, grant I lose a crown!
(An awful charge, not merely a gay circlet
To grace the brow) integrity remains!
Were I not happier? aye, and worthier too—
A sturdy peasant, with undaunted front,
Grappling with stern adversity, than wielding
Sceptres by wrong obtain'd, or violence
To inbred honesty:—my friend, I have led
My countrymen to battle: each bosom own'd
As brave a heart, and in his country's cause
As warm as mine—and haply each like me,
Had his heart's partner too at home, who trembled,
And wept for him, as Ina for her Egbert.
There is a brotherhood in tented fields,
Where all with equal venture play for lives,
That wakes a consciousness we are but men,
And men alike, till worth have made distinction.

[Exeunt.]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

EDELFLEDA. BERTHA.

Edel. Leave me, good Bertha, thy officious love
But wearies me.—

Ber. Thy pardon, dearest mistress.

Edel. These cumbrous robes! these idle ornaments

Oppress my bosom. Thou hast deck'd me out
As 'twere a victim for the sacrifice.—

I am the victim! thou hast wisely done!

Ber. The artful Baldred rules King Cenulph's
mind;

Nay, can compel, some say, the stubborn fates,
By prayers, and penance, and mysterious rites.
Through his means haply thou may'st triumph yet.

Edel. Yes! I *will* triumph yet—but if the
means

Recoiling fancy dare but faintly shadow!

Oh Bertha! Bertha! dost thou think kind nature
Form'd me for darkest deeds? oh, no! her hand
Temper'd my soul to gentleness and love,
And stamp'd it with a royal loftiness;
But it is given in possession now
To such a friend!—so irresistible!

[*Hiding her face in BERTHA'S bosom.*

Thou 'rt good and kind!—oh! throw me from
thy heart!

I never more shall there deserve a place.

Ber. That heart is thine, my princess,—owns
no bounds

To its devotion! nay, take hope—take comfort—
'Th' astonished king was as thyself indignant.
'Thou saw'st the prince in chains! King Cenulph
loves thee—

He will annul the marriage.—

Edel. How annul it?

Not if *she* live! he cannot sunder hearts.→

No, if she *live*—it is impossible.—

I would have fled ere the ungentle wish
That *she* were not—

Ber. Then think of her as dead!—
Thy wish might stamp her doom.

Edel. (with horror.) What, murder her!

Ber. Not that.—Stern policy has instruments
Secret and sure. Thou know'st the envious
 abbot

Beneath that saintly garb wraps deadly hate.

Edel. Let me not *hear*—nor *guess* what thou
would'st say.

It will be mine to soothe him when 'tis done!

I must not bear the horrid consciousness

About my heart ;—for I will win his love

By virtue *then*, by tenderness, and patience!

Then did I say? ah, *then!* what thought was that.

My guilty soul admitted? oh! is virtue

So convenient? *will* she? *can* she dwell again

In the polluted bosom she forsook?

Or if she could—remorse must usher her!

Unutterable woe!—oh, save me!—save me!

(After a pause.)

One only means is left may yet preserve

These hands from stain of blood. Some pitying
angel

Whispers the thought.—Come, Bertha! let us
haste.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

Bal. (alone.) Too long, methinks, the king
confers with Egbert.

He leads the army!—I would have it so.—
The time has been, men fell in fight.—Death rul'd
Unquestion'd *there*.—Yet now, methinks, for him
All weapons lose their edge!—But has this hand
Forgot the means t' effect this bosom's purpose?
No! by this hand, he never sees her more!—
I hate her—yet I envy him his joys.—
What, wedded to her! Hell!—nor shall she live!
For grant the marriage cancell'd, and that I
Could love again—she never can be mine!
From tie connubial, and parental love,
For ever by my own rash vows cut off,
No eye shall beam with rapture to meet mine,
And share the mutual thought ere we can speak;
No hand clasp mine with boundless confidence—

Enter EGBERT.

Egb. What! murmur'st thou of confidence and
joy?

Of eyes that meet, and hands that clasp in love!

Bal. That sinful in their sweetness are these
things,

And as rank weeds that wear a gaudy blossom,
Should be uprooted from the wholesome soil;
While, as the liberal herbage spreading wide,
Or sacred grain, friendly to general life,
The public weal alone should be our care.

Egb. These maxims, holy kinsman, are severe
For one erewhile a gay, a gallant soldier.
What! for the public weal wouldst thou uproot
That which does make the public weal our care?
Why fill the eyes with tears? Why leaps the
heart?

“ Our country” but the theme of our discourse?
 We love the land where first the light of heaven
 Broke on our eyes!—dear by all childhood’s joys!
 Her soil enfolds our fathers’ honour’d bones!
 Our friends and kinsmen reap her golden har-
 vests!

But there are ties! which thou hast thrown from
 thee,
 That more than *these* endear our country’s name!
 That brace the thrilling nerves, and swell the bo-
 som—

Doubling the powers and energies of man!

Bal. Ha! did *I* throw from me those ties?
 (how’er

My heav’n-ward thoughts despise them now!)
 thou treach’rous,

Thou gay insinuating flatterer!—thou,
 Who stealing on the promise of my bliss—

Egb. ’Tis false, proud priest! Her love was
 mine, ere thou

Hadst with loathed passion gaz’d on Ina’s
 charms.

She ever hated thee!—

Bal. Thou say’st so, boaster!

Haply my soldiers’ hearts alike were thine,
 Ere I had led them forth. —I! who so long
 Fenc’d with this arm thy father’s tottering throne
 Against dread Ethelbald.—

Egb. Hold, Baldred, hold!

I grant my father’s throne was sore beset
 When mighty Ethelbald came thundering on.
 But force me not to say *who* fenc’d his throne.

Bal. Nay, doubly treacherous was thy part!
 thou can’st

Prank’d in gay youth, and glittering novelty—
 With idle promises, alluring wiles—

And won the dastard knaves, who had forsook
 me,
 To turn again with swift recoiling force
 On the triumphant foe; thus foully wresting
 The dear-earn'd meed of longer services.

Egb. Vain reasoner! true; the flying bands I
 rallied

By promises, *not* idle, if fulfill'd!
 Nor wrong'd thee of the meed of victory,—
 For on thy brow I would have plac'd her wreath.

Bal. 'Twas all hypocrisy!—'twas insult all!
 Thou still hast wrong'd me,—but I scorn thee
 still,

Fortune's sleek minion! Flattery's demi-god!
 Awhile thou yet may'st flutter in their sunshine,
 A gay-wing'd insect, till the northern blast
 From short existence sweep thee, while the eagle
 Towers in her native skies!—

Egb. Peace! coward priest!
 Who thus secure, beneath that saintly garb,
 Dost blacken worth, and rail at envied greatness.

Bal. Thy worth I own not, nor thy fleeting
 greatness.

Power is true greatness! Go, guide thou the
 sword
 Thousands of sinews wield! but *I* can slack
 Those sinews that they loose their hold. *Thus*
 wrapt,

I sway by holy awe the souls of men,
 And am superior in superior *power*!

Egb. I mock thy blustering impotence and
 pride,

But I respect the garb thou dost abuse,
 And, therefore, priest, I unchastis'd will leave
 thee,

While yet my better thoughts restrain my arm.

Bal. Thinks he to awe me by his lofty carriage?

And shall my spirit stand rebuk'd by his?

Shall I, in blood his equal,—hang the head?

Wondering, confess his rare endowments? Hail him

With idiot incense as the vulgar use?

There are tame spirits who recline content

Beneath the greatness that o'ershadows them.

The timid herds denied by nature fangs

To wage offensive war, will throng together—

Obscure equality! The lion stalks

Alone!—unrival'd he!—the lonely tiger

Leaps single on his prey!—these brook no equal;

Nor will I, crouching, a superior own!—

Exit.

SCENE III.

Ina's Bower.

[*INA, watching over her sleeping Child, Alice Blanch, &c.*]

Ina. Still Egbert comes not, Alice! Oh, my fears!

It seems an age that I have fix'd my eyes

On that sweet sleeping innocence, thus hoping

To lose the consciousness of each sad moment

That slowly drags its length till he return.

Al. The noble Alwyn went with him, dear mistress;

Thou know'st his prudence well.

Ina. Still Egbert comes not.

Al. (*after looking at the child.*)

His sleeping features wear a joyous smile,

And see; he stretches forth his little hands!

Regard it as a happy omen, madam.

Ina. Kind Alice, thanks. Would my sad heart could do so!

Poor helpless slumberer! oh! had I been born
A village maid! a cottager, my Egbert!

The war of elements the only danger
That threaten'd our low roof—thy innocent
smile

Had waken'd but a mother's honest joy,
Nor chill'd my heart, as now, with nameless
fears.

Al. Alas! the sadden'd fancy gives its colour
To all it rests upon, and often paints
In objects of delight some idle terror.

Ina. Hark! Alice, hark! feel how my poor heart beats!

Some dreadful ill hangs o'er us! It must come,
The hour of vengeance!—Royalty insulted!
A father's love deceiv'd!—Alice! how guilty
Do I appear to my affrighted conscience
Whene'er my Egbert tarries long away;
But when he comes,—and when I hear his voice
And meet his eye,—and feel how I am lov'd—
And with what full devotion I am his,
It seems not only happiness, but virtue,
Glory, and honour!—all, are mine—and lift
My proud heart—

Al. Now I hear a busy stir!
Sure 'tis the prince!—

Ina. (*hastening to meet him*). My lord, my
life, my husband.

(*Meets EDELFLEDA who enters with BERTHA.*
EDELFLEDA measures her with her eyes as
she totters back to ALICE.)

Edel. Why do you tremble, madam, and turn
pale?

I own that this intrusion can be warranted
By none but its true motive.

Ina. Motive! Princess?

What motive prompts the gentle mind to seek
The unhappy,—but some courteous, kindly im-
pulse?

And your eyes speak not such. Some dire mis-
chance

Perhaps—oh! tell me—tell me all—and with one
blow;

-- Alice—support me——

(*sinks into Alice's arms.*)

Edel. (*aside to Ber.*) Is she so beautiful
As to my tortur'd soul my eyes present her?

Ber. 'Tis but the beauty of the menial train.
The royal air is wanting.

Edel. Say'st thou so?

Ah, no! that timid softness wins its way
More surely to the heart.—I too were gentle,
If I, like her, were blest.——

Ber. Perversely thus
Ingenious jealousy will rack itself
To deck its object.——

Edel. Jealousy no longer,
But hate, contempt, and vengeance——

(*to Ina who recovers*)

I am sorry

That you anticipate what I would say.

If thus thou swoon while yet in ignorance,

How wilt thou tear with self-destructive passion

Those tresses in their dark luxuriance bound

With skilful negligence around thy brow!

Deface that matchless beauty with thy hands,

Play o'er each practis'd act of desperation!

When thou art told,—the prince thou hast en-
thrall'd,

In a vile dungeon, bound with traitor's chains,
Awaits the doom of his disloyalty.—

Ina. Have mercy! heavenly powers! imprisonment! chain'd!

But, no—it cannot be—thou com'st to prove me.
Thou too hast lov'd him, lady, and thou could'st
not,

Oh no, thou could'st not thus unmov'd, declare,
That he whom thou hast lov'd—impossible!

Thy voice had falter'd, and thy tears had
flow'd!

Yes, thou had'st pitied me, and kindred sorrow
Had one short moment link'd our adverse souls.

Edel. Who tells thee, insolent! I love the
prince?

Or ever lov'd the base degenerate Egbert?

'Tis true that policy had doom'd our hands
To a forced union once—and *therefore* was he
Sacred to such as *thou*!—treason the thought
In any subject's breast to match with him.

Ina. If it be treason, I alone am guilty.—
Treason regards but the aspiring subject;
Nor can the same be charg'd on yielding greatness.

Then plead for me in this, howe'er thou hate me.

Plead for me, royal Edelgeda! Claim

For *me* the chains he wears (if it be so

That he indeed does wear them); set *him* free:

(*kneeling.*)

I, I alone have sinn'd against the laws!

The king, and him, and thee!

Edel. All! all! thou fiend!

And think'st thou it can aught atone my wrongs,

Though low I see thee, grov'ling at my feet?

Off, shameless woman! Shameless Egbert's
choice!

Ina. (rising, and with dignity.) The woman
 honor'd by Prince Egbert's choice,
 Finds on that choice her claim to more respect.
 As Egbert's wife, I must withdraw from one
 Unmindful what to Egbert's wife is due.

(Turning to Alice.)

Raise gently, Alice, my sweet infant boy,
 Lest he affrighted wake; then follow me.

*Edel. (Stopping Alice, and gazing passionately
 on the child.)*

Oh! heaven! Is this his child?

Ina. Madam, it is.

You startle him. I pray you speak more softly.
 Ungentle tones ne'er wounded yet his ear.

Edel. Nay, take it hence. I know not why I
 look'd on't.

(INA, &c. going.)

I had forgot the purpose of my visit;
 Will you not stay and hear it?

(INA returns. EDELFEDEA softens her tone.)

Ina, say—

Would'st thou Prince Egbert, whom thou calls't
 thy husband,

Were freed from prison, and from shameful death?
 I come to tell thee how to compass this.

Ina. Oh! pardon, gracious princess! that my
 ignorance

Misjudg'd your generous purpose. Yet goodness,
 sure

Ne'er wore before such haughty looks and tones
 As you ev'n now did lend her. Name the means!
 Weak as I am, my courage will not shrink
 In such a cause, from any fearful task.

Edel. There needs to save him, but that thou
 forego

The idle title thou erewhile did'st boast;

For, as thou know'st, it is of youth's gay
coinage;

Unsanction'd thus—an empty appellation—
Offensive as 'tis empty. Claim it not.

Ina. Princess! I understand you. I am ready,
By *death*, to cancel my pure marriage vow,
That *he* may live, but by no other means;
Nor is it fit I longer parley hold
With *one* who counsels thus Prince Egbert's wife.
[*Exit.*

Edel. (*after watching her in a tumult of passion.*)
Thus scornful to withdraw!—

(*Striking her bosom.*)

Hell! hell is here!

(*Turning eagerly to BERTHA.*)

Did'st mark the infant? Had it not his brow?
Methought I could have snatch'd it to my bosom
With transport such as mothers scarce have felt,
And instant came a horror—such a horror!
That I had dash'd the tender form to atoms,
Had I but held it in my shuddering grasp!

Ber. Oh! let us quickly leave this fatal scene!
Too much it racks thy bosom.

Edel. How I hate her!

I envy her her very dangers, Bertha.

She claim his chains! 'twere mine the right to
share them.

Or rather *I* had brought all Mercia's power
To avenge his wrongs! Nor had *I* prov'd my love
By tears and prayers, low grov'ling on the earth,
But by such gifts as kingdoms! sceptres!
thrones!

Adoring nations kneeling at his feet!

Ber. It yet will be so. This presumptuous
woman

Will meet the death she merits, and her image,

Her worthless image, fade from the remembrance
Of *him* who should be yours!

Edel. Yes, *mine* by right!

By solemn compact *mine*! Attested *mine*
By witness nations! And, thinks she I will yield
him?

But, ah! he loves me not! What were his hand,
His cold reluctant hand, without his heart?—
Shall I not find some solace in revenge?—
Yet will that sweeten life like what ev'n now
These eyes have seen?

Enter EGBERT.

Egb. Oh, heaven! whom find I here?

Edel. I came to see this miracle of beauty —
This other Helen; for whose fatal charms
Two realms must lie in ruin, and for whom
Prince Egbert dooms his people to the sword;
And I *have* seen her.

(*Going, he stops her.*)

Egb. Hast thou seen my wife?

Ha! Edelfleda!—How didst thou address her?

Edel. (*contemptuously.*) As is her due.

Egb. Then as heaven's fairest work!

As virtue's brightest gem! as nature's pride,
Did'st thou address her!—and—as Wessex'
princess!

Edel. Say rather as a subject too aspiring,
Presumptuous, and vain; who gave her ear
To idle flatteries from royal lips,
And swerv'd from honour's path. I would have
sav'd her,

But she scorn'd my counsel.

Egb. (*eagerly.*) Save her from what?—

Say, princess! is aught practis'd against Ina?

Edel. (*going.*) Nay, it imports not me.—I would depart.—

Egb. (*stopping her.*) Oh, Edel fleda! I have held thee noble,

Have ever honour'd thee.

Edel. Ye powers supreme!

Oh hear his words! mark his unblushing brow!

Thou! thou hast honour'd me?—hast held me noble?

And didst thou honour me in Cenulph's presence,

When late—oh! grant me patience, Heaven! an hour,

A little hour has scarce elaps'd,—since mock'd, Insulted—scorn'd.

Egb. This keen reproach were due
Had I thy royal nobleness mistrusted;
'Twas from thy generous nature that I hop'd
For help and stay in this my utmost need.
Canst thou forget when in our earliest youth,
Ere yet the fatal torch of discord blaz'd,
Severing our houses,—of thy mother 'reft,
Mine prov'd our common parent? happy days!

Edel. (*with emotion.*) And were they happy days to *thee* too, Egbert?

Egb. Yes, they were days of thoughtless, unmix'd joy.—

Hadst thou, sore press'd with sorrow, said to me,
“Friend of my youth! thy help!”—oh, Edel fleda!
What had I not encounter'd in thy service?
But thou desertest *me*—art my worst foe!—

Edel. I! I, thy foe? *I*, who for thy sake live
In torments, fiercer than e'er yet consum'd
The guiltiest wretch.—*I*, who but err'd in this,
That yielding to our parents true obedience,
I gave my heart where they had giv'n my hand.

Egb. (distressed.) Princess!—my heart—my hand—no longer mine,—
How often with the secret on my lips,
Sought I, ere this, to throw me at thy feet :
But thy averted looks,—thy cold disdain—
The sudden anger flashing on thy cheek—

Edel. Were the last struggles of expiring pride!
And hast thou lov'd? nor know'st love's various language?

Tremble, yes tremble, at the bound I've pass'd.
Nothing remain'd to wretched Edelfleda
But pride of soul, and that lies prostrate now.
And dost thou think I will recede? no, Egbert!
Triumph or death be mine!

Egb. Triumph! o'er whom?

Edel. O'er *her*! the source of all my ill! o'er *her*!—

Who, as the sweeping pestilence, unseen
Stole o'er the tender germ, and blasted it,
That, growing with our growth, unfolding fair,
Had ripen'd into love, and made *me* blest!

Egb. Hold, woman! would'st thou be a vengeful fury?

And will my deadliest hate? my soul's deep curse—

Edel. Thy hatred? yes—thy curse were far less bitter

Than thus to see ye blest.—

Egb. (kindly.) Nay, Edelfleda,
Be thou thyself again. Thou once wert generous—
I, who have wrong'd thee, throw me on thy mercy :
Be thou the guardian of my happiness,
And let me bless thee for each joy I know.
I, by my father's order, seek the army
Ere evening close.—Oh! by our early days
Of childish friendship! by our common mother!

(For thou didst give her that endearing name!)
 And by her dying blessing o'er us breath'd,
 As we together knelt and mingled tears!
 Oh! be thou great, as not to mortal frailty
 Has yet been giv'n!—Princess, protect my wife!

Enter INA.

I hear his voice! 'tis he! my lord! my Egbert!

(They embrace.)

Why kneel to *her*? why claim of *her* protection?
 And canst not *thou* protect me? *thou*, my husband!

Egb. Alas! my love, I must on the instant hence;

The army claims me, and the king commands
 I can but fold thee to my faithful bosom.—

(They embrace in speechless emotion.)

My Ina!—oh! I would be firm.—I pray thee
 Tremble not thus.—Nay, smile—though forc'd
 the smile,

It were a pious fraud, and my poor heart
 Will half deceive itself.—

Ina. (in great distress.) My lord! my love!

Edel. (aside.) And must I witness the soft melting eye!

Hear the endearing name! mark all their fondness!

And thus learn each sweet several joy I lose!

And is't of *me* he claims for *her* protection?

Let justice take its course. *He knows* I love,

And therefore *must* be mine: and for *she* knows
 it,

My pride cannot consent that *she* should live.

[Exit with Bertha.]

Egb. Alas! my love, to part with thee is hard;
 Never so hard before. Yet, my kind father,

Howe'er the parent may relent—that kings
Can wipe away all trace of injury.
Go, then, my prince, as was appointed, wearing
That open brow—a stranger to mistrust.
When night shall close the eye of vigilance,
And with her friendly mantle shroud our steps,
I will steal forth with Ina, both conceal'd
In such rude weeds as wrap the villager.

Ina. Thou art our guardian angel!—and my
child?

Alw. We will not leave him. On his mother's
breast,
He shall be cradled. On the gentle steed
Thou lov'st so well, for that he brought thy Eg-
bert

So often to thy arms, ye shall be plac'd,
And I beside you will conduct your steps.

Egb. How for a moment shall I leave thee,
love.

Now that a doubt—Oh, no! a doubt would wrong
My father'—yet—a fear—Love's idle fear—

Ina. (*with joy and eagerness.*) I have nor
doubt, nor fear. I follow thee,
My lord! My husband! *thee*, my all of bliss!
And bear our mutual treasure in my arms!
Rear'd softly, I ne'er knew life's rougher hour;
Yet shalt thou find me as the rudest peasant,
Hardy, and firm of nerve. If night should wrap
Her brow in clouds, I'll bless the kinder shade
Favouring our flight; or, if her lamp shine forth,
I'll think it is to light me on my way.
The howling wolf shall seem but as a friend,
Scaring who may pursue me (for true love
Never knew fear)! The blust'ring winds that
meet me,

I'll hail as eager messengers from thee;
And, if they scatter from their ruffled wings
The driving hail-storm on my houseless head,
I will but lap our infant's mantle close,
And say it is plain nature's ruder welcome.

Exeunt severally.

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

ACT. IV.

SCENE I.

CENULPH (*alone.*)

The cheerful day revives me. All night long
In thousand changeful forms my labouring fancy
Presented Sigiswold. The very smile
Beam'd on me still—The smile he wore in death!
He wrung my hand as then; and, as I gaz'd,
He chang'd all ghastly, horrible, and frown'd—
A frown that search'd my soul! In agony
I shook off sleep—again I sunk o'erwearied,
And then methought my son came towering on,
Nor touch'd the ground, but in contempt.

Enter OSRIC.

Osr. My Liege!

From royal Egbert messengers arrive.

Cen. Conduct them hither. [*Osric goes.*]

My distemper'd thoughts 'bode nought but ill.

Enter EDRED.

What tidings from the army?

Ed. Prince Egbert greets his father and his king

With duteous love and firmest loyalty;
Already to his banners throng thy subjects
With ardour never witness'd. He had number'd
Ten thousand men in arms ere he dismiss'd us.
The peasant leaves the coulter in the furrow
To snatch his battle-axe, or ponderous spear;
The aged bowman, all unnerv'd by time,
Grasps the tough yew he can no longer bend.
Ev'n mothers bid their slender striplings arm,
To follow their lov'd prince! their future king!

Cen. Their future king! Say they, "their future king?"

Are they impatient that old Cenulph lives?
It is enough. You may retire.

[*Exit Edred.*]

The prince

Elated, thinks 'tis but to break a lance
With Ethelbald, and gaily speed him back
To love and Ina. [*he appears in great agitation.*]

Enter BALDRED.

Baldred, thou art welcome!

I think thou art true, nor like the summer cour-
tier,

Dost more affect the prince than thy old master;
Oswald I doubt, and Orgar.—The smooth Al-
wyn

Is wholly his.—The father's tenderness

Has, more than all, prov'd traitor to the king.

Did I say *king*? Ah! *king* no longer, Baldred,
Than it may please Prince Egbert!

Bal. (aside.) This is well!

Now will my poison work!

(Aloud.) It was yourself

Did fondly loose the reign to headstrong youth,

Till as the mountain torrent rushing down

That gathers at each fall redoubled force,

And spreads with sweep resistless o'er the plain:

Ev'n so Prince Egbert's fortunes, with swollen tide

Bear on, o'erwhelming the long level honours

Of his good father's reign.

Cen. Thou chid'st me, Baldred.

Haply, in flattery's sunshine hour, I had

Ill brook'd thy honest roughness. Now I need

A friend like thee.

Bal. I speak as duty prompts,

And fearless speak, as suits a holy man,

Wean'd from the vanities of this low world

To commune with the skies. 'Tis *there* I read

Of danger to the state—where most she looks

With confidence for aid.

Cen. The urgency

Of public danger, friend, must o'erbear all.

Bal. Ha! say'st thou so? then Ina should not
live.

Cen. Nay, but my son!—

Bald. (significantly.) True, thou hast cause to
fear him.

Cen. *Fear* him? Was that thy word? What,
fear my child?

Bald. Yes, thou *dost fear* the prince, and
thou hast *cause*:

Ev'n the wolf's whelp will gambol round its
dam

With new life's graces felt through all creation,

But mark, ere long the blood-red eye balls glare!

The keen hook'd fangs! anon th'invaded fold!

The slaughter'd flock ! Yes, Egbert *was* a child,
His father's darling, sportive, guileless ; gay ;
But now he is a prince, in manhood's prime,
Bold—strong—ambitious—and the soldier's idol !

Cen. Beware, good Baldred, how thou plant
a fear

So fatal in my breast. I lov'd my son—
With fond indulgence lov'd him ! ah ! beware,
I sully not a long and bloodless reign
By some foul deed. Oh ! let me trust my child
The few short years that nature yet may lend !

Bald. Nay, trust him till with impious hand
he pluck

The diadem from thy time-silver'd brow.

Me it reck's not. Crowns, sceptres, earthly toys,
Are in my purer eyes of no account.

I can retire within my holy cell,
That, self defended in its sanctity,
Not shameless vice shall dare to violate.

Welcome to me the sacred fold I left,—

A willing shepherd, seeking to reclaim

The wandering sheep ! (*going.*)

Cen. Stay, holy Baldred, stay.—

Since I lost Sigiswold I have walk'd darkling,

In doubt and dread to err.—Erewhile I led

My armies forth,—fought foremost, and return'd
victorious, 'mid my people's acclamations !

What am I now ? feeble, and old, and scorned,

I sit at home, and tremble—while—my son !

Methinks I stand upon a fearful brink !

An evil spirit beckons from below !

Take thou my hand—support, and guide my
ste s !

Bald. It was for this, my Liege, I did forego

My wonted course of holy meditation.

How I have kept strict watch and ward for thee

Thou now shalt learn. Beneath a peasant's garb,
By darkness favour'd, Ina had escap'd—

Cen. Escap'd—how was it?

Bald. Let it now suffice—

Arrested in her flight I lead her hither.

Cen. Thanks to thy vigilance! Thou trusty friend!

Bald. You said the public weal must o'erbear all!

There is nor peace nor safety for the realm,
While in its very heart,—its seat of life,
This canker-worm is foster'd—secretly
Corroding the sweet tie of filial love.
Is not the sacred bond of public faith
(With foul disgrace to thee!) by her means
broken?

A princess grac'd with every fair endowment
(Who, for her marriage dower in one hand bore
A sceptre! in the other, Peace!)—insulted—
Driven to avenge her wrongs? my royal master!
'Tis but to pluck this canker-worm away,
And crush it underneath your foot, and still
You hesitate!—

Cen. No, Baldred—she shall die—
If she refuse the marriage vow to cancel,
And seek the refuge of the holy cloister—
The daughter of brave Sigiswold shall die!

(aside, with emotion.)

Oh, Sigiswold! thy frown!

Bald. *(aside, exultingly.)* She's in my power!
(Aloud) Good, my Liege, the royal signet haply—
Might sanction measures—such as watchful
care—

Cen. *(giving it)* Take it,—'tis done!—and yet
I would the law

Might seem to doom her, Baldred; nor would I
Appear to move this business.

Will thy reluctant tenderness report.
The rest are bent in all as we would have them.
(*Exeunt.*)

(The scene opens and discovers the Lords seated in judgment.)

2d *Lord.* King Cenulph loves his son. It were
not easy,

Alw. (eagerly.) King Cenulph was the father of
his people!

Ere Baldred practised on declining age

3d Lord. Hark! I hear their steps.

He takes his seat with due ceremony.

Cen. Have ye, my lords, each several charge
prepar'd

Against this woman? that she may appear,
And answer for her crime?

Mor. We have, my Liege.

Cen. We do not wish that she be hardly dealt with,

Nor would we pluck up by the roots a flower

Our son has sometime foster'd with fond care,
But rather place it rich in blooming sweets,
An offering on the shrine of public good.

(*The lords bow assent.*)

Bring in the prisoner.

(*INA is brought in, guarded.*)

Holy abbot, speak.

Bald. Daughter of Sigiswold, thou art summon'd hither,

To answer to high charges brought against thee.
Thou hast, by subtle and unlawful arts,
Wrought on the royal heir of Wessex' throne,
And drawn him from his true allegiance;
That he hath broke the faith the king, his father,
Had pledg'd for him, and thereby brought on us
A bloody war, and on the throne dishonour.

Cen. Speak, Ina, nor dissemble; thy confession

May win stern justice to commit thy cause
To mercy's hands. Say, was't by flatteries,
By honied words thou did'st so far prevail?

Ina. My king, my royal master! Ever gracious!

Thanks for thy gentler speech, that gives me
time

To wake and rouse my senses to these horrors,
So new, so strange, around me, conjur'd up
To terrify my weakness!——

(*A pause.*)

My confession,

And my defence are one. On simple truth
I rest. For my good father's services,
Most honour'd Cenulph, and his happy death
(For that he held it happy his last words,
As ye all know, declar'd), I was advanc'd
To attend your late lov'd consort. In her presence

I often saw the prince, but practis'd nought
 Of what ye charge me with. I am not skill'd
 In arts unhallow'd, lords, nor even practis'd
 The arts less blam'd of courtesy and smiles.
 Nay when through all the realm one voice was
 heard

Of gratulation on his martial deeds,
 Oh! when the widow's tears were dried to bless
 him!

When age shook off its weight of years for joy!
 And children gambol'd round his homeward steps,
 While checking his proud steed he smil'd upon
 them!

And when his boundless heart to all went forth,
 To age with filial love! to glowing youth
 With all a brother's warmth! To the fall'n foe
 With sadden'd grace, as though he blush'd at
 conquest!

I still was silent—though sweet tears would
 gush

To hear his praises from a nation's lips!

(*She appears overcome.*)

Alwyn. It was a glorious triumph for a prince
 So young in war's dread lore!

Bald. Such deeds more justly
 Had in a simple maid rais'd distant awe,
 Not the ambitious thought to match with him.

Ina. Still was I happy in my secret homage,
 (To blame alone in that it border'd much
 On what were due to heaven) nor knew a wish
 Beyond what each ensuing hour now gave,
 To see him, hear him, and retain each word
 His gracious lips let fall; when, on a day,
 (How fortunate esteem'd till now!) the queen,
 For some slight instance of my duteous care—

The prince assisting — said, “ My children,
thanks!”

I met Prince Egbert's glance—It bore my fate!
Confus'd, I hasten'd from the royal chamber.
He follow'd me, and pour'd forth all his soul!
For in those words he read the queen's consent;
Nor did I otherwise interpret them,
Who had no power to think but as he thought.
You, royal Cenulph, then were on the borders,
To treat with Ethelbald. When you return'd
With Mercia's princess—I was Egbert's wife.

Cen. Thy father's services are not forgotten,
With which thou artfully dost usher in
Thy tale of innocence. Although thy deed
In any other were as treason censur'd,
The worth of Sigiswold shall gloss it over,
And I will pardon thee, if thou retire
Within the walls of some far monastery,
And take the holy vows that sever thee
For ever from the world and all its ties.
This, by thy free consent, and presently!
Declaring void, th' unsanction'd marriage.

Ina. King!

I am a wife, and mother of a prince,
Who must not blush in riper years, to hear
His mother's name.

Bal. Dost thou, perverse and thankless,
Turn from the outstretch'd hand of royal mercy?
The law to death has doom'd thee. But the king
Would snatch thee from thy fate, and we, his
council,
Applaud his deed; while thou, ungrateful wo-
man!—

Ina. My lords, the sentence you declare as
law,

I cannot have incurr'd. The prince is free :

He is a man, and has the privilege
 Ye none of you would yield, to chuse his mate !
 But if the claims of state demand my death,
 I, for my country's weal, can lay my head,
 Calmly as any of ye, on the block.

A death so glorious, by my countrymen
 With grateful tears acknowledg'd, will not stain
 The name of *her* who bore your future king.

Bald. Consider well. Delay is not allow'd.
 To-morrow, or the scaffold or the cloister,

Ina. (*with terror.*) And must I then, my lords—
 prepare for death ?

Nor see my husband—more ?

Bald. Thou never wilt see him thou hast
 nam'd thus,

Which e'er thou chuse.

(*Seeing her overcome.*)

Think of that tender frame,

Mov'd thus by ills, as yet but faintly imag'd !

Oh ! how will it sustain the real horrors

Of infamous and public execution ?

While the outrageous populace throng round
 thee

With curses loud, or haply, coarser pity.

I marvel not to see thee shrink appall'd !

Yes, shroud thy timid softness in the cloister,

Where sister saints shall fold thee to their
 bosoms,

From the rough world and all its ills secure.

Ina. Mock not, my lord, what nature's va-
 rious hand

Stamp't on the weaker sex to set off yours.

The finer texture of our nerves will thrill

At horrid sounds : the changeful cheek will
 blanch,

Though not with fear ; or glow with crimson hue,

Though not a thought less pure have stain'd the
mind:

And, though I tremble, lords, nor can support
me—

Nor can distinctly mark this awful presence
(For in amazement swims my troubled vision);
Yet does this frame, so fragile, bear a soul
More constant than ye think, where youthful
pride

Both knows to *make* the choice which virtue
prompts,

And by that choice *abide*. 'Tis death, my lords;
Dishonour,—never!

Bald. Thou wilt think otherwise;
Thou art not firm to meet the law's full rigour.

Ina. Baldred, I am. If what thou say'st be
law.

I must live honour'd as Prince Egbert's wife,
Or must not live: and, when ye shed my blood,
Remember, 'tis Prince Egbert's wife ye murder.
May I retire, my Liege, and wait my sentence?

Cen. Attend her hence, Lord Oswald. *Ina*,
mark,

'Tis *thou* who hast rejected offer'd mercy.

[*Exit INA.*]

Alwyn, thou see'st how vain it is to strive
Against her firm resolve.

Alw. Most firm, my Liege,
In honour's mid-day course. I thought no less
Of one, though of the weaker sex, and gentlest
Ev'n of the gentle—sprung of *Sigiswold*!

Bal. Alwyn, would say, the father's loyalty
Sanctions the offspring's treason.

Cen. (*to the lords, rising.*) In your hands
I leave my seal: affix it to the sentence
Your steadier judgment prompts, alas! not
biass'd

As mine must be. Whate'er you may decree,
 Be her own house her only prison, lords;
 And though ye place a trusty guard around it,
 Let her not be controul'd in aught, save what
 Might furnish means to escape. A moment stay;
 Let me not see you set your hands to this,
 Nor hear of it, my lords, till all be over.

[*Exit.*

Bald. The impending danger, nay, the sure
 destruction

Of this ill-fated land, if we avert not

The sword of war, and this the only means,
 Have been well weigh'd before; and I have here
 The form and substance of the business.

The public danger suffers not delay.

The child must die with her, or nought is done.

Are we not all agreed?

Alw. No. *I*, my lords!

I dare protest against the bloody sentence!

Bald. Alwyn, beware! 'Tis well known thou
 hast been

Base pander to Prince Egbert's worst excesses.

What by my holy office I declare

To be most just—most necessary—thou,

Bold as thou art, wilt thou, at thy life's hazard,

Vainly oppose? I do take shame, my lords,

That this man's taunts should thus have mov'd
 my temper;

I who have thrown aside the ruthless sword

To bear the pastor's crook! who did forego

The pride and pomp of war—the shout of
 triumph,

For humble beads, and the low voice of prayer!

Would *I*, my friends, would *I* have doom'd this
 lamb,

Pride of my flock! but for the good of all?

2d. *Lord.* None doubt your pious motives,
holy Baldred.

Bald. There is no hope of lasting peace for
Wessex,

But in the union of her royal house
With that of Mercia.—This to be procur'd
By Ina's death alone,—'twere treason, lords,
A moment to delay her sentenc'd death!—

Alw. I tell the proud remorseless priest,—that
Heaven,

Thou would'st make 'complice of thy cruelty,
Will baffle thee. Yes—the red bolt of vengeance
Will find the guilty head beneath the cowl,
As surely as the bare and houseless ruffian's,
Who spoils the mighty traveller!—nor waits
The swifter fire till tardy thunders warm!

[*Exit.*

(*The scene closes on them as they are signing
her sentence.*)

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

INA'S Bower.

INA, OSRIC, and GUARDS.

Ina. My home! Thou scene of happiness! my
home!

(Oh! the sweet recollection in that word!)
For the last time my eyes would fain retrace

Each several spot so dear!—but blinding tears.—

(Seeing the guards, and shuddering.)

These savage men! good Osric, pray dismiss them—

They gaze on me with bold, ungentle looks,
That wear not the respect methinks were due
To wretchedness like mine.

Osric. (makes signs they should retire.) You are obeyed.

Ina. Is thy heart hard, that Baldred chuses thee

To be my jailor!

Osric. Lady, I'm a soldier,
Command the troops that guard the royal person;
And while I hold this charge, were my own father

Entrusted to my keeping, I were firm.

Ina. And must the soldier know no touch of nature?

Osric. I said not so. I meant but to declare
The soldier's honour must not shrink, although
His heart-strings burst.

Ina. Methinks, my lord
Did shew thee favour once?—

Osric. 'Twas on an outpost.

Wounded, and left as dead, the tide of battle
Roll'd onwards where I lay.—The prince was there

(For he was every where, and ruled the fates,)
He plac'd me on his steed, supported, led me,—
Himself deep wading through swoln Isis' flood,
And gave me to a cottager in charge.—
Nay, thought of me in victory's madd'ning hour,
And sent ere night one skill'd to close my wounds.
Lady, if *hard* this heart, th' impression grav'd
On hardest things, is deepest, and most durable!

Ina. Thou 'rt mov'd!—kind soul!—my grief,—
not I, did wrong thee.

Sure thou *couldst* pity me.

Osric. Oh! might I prove it!

Ina. Thou may'st! for though thou canst not
spare my life

'Tis thine to soften death. Thou, by thy office,
Hast access ever to the royal presence.

Conduct me to the king.

Osric. (*astonished.*) Ha! say'st thou?—where-
fore?

Ina. I would but claim a grandsire's pitying
care

For Egbert's—for thy benefactor's—child.

Then look on death with such meek constancy
As innocence may lend.—

Osric. Thou hast prevail'd.

But lady, wait—I pray you wait a space

'Till darker night close round, and the hush'd
palace

Assure no interruption.—'Tis but life

I hazard here,—the soldier's *honour* safe!

For Alwyn said the king forbade controul,

Save in what might afford thee means of freedom.

Ina. Thou generous man! thy precious life is
sure;

The prince at hazard of his own will guard it.

But what of Alwyn? thou didst speak his name.

(*giving her a dagger.*)

Osric. He bade me give thee this; yet, charge
thee, live

If it be possible.—

(*taking it eagerly.*)

Ina. I understand him.

[*After looking at it with emotion she goes to a
table on which are emblems of worship.*]

Here I shall offer up my last sad prayer

When I return ; and, if the secret voice
Of conscience speak assent, yes,—I will hug thee,
Horrible as thou art!—thou last best friend,
That canst alone prevent the headsman's stroke.

(Lays the dagger on the table.)

Here too I place my Egbert's pictur'd form,
It might offend.

(Takes a picture from her breast.)

And here, these gems, his tokens!

(Places ornaments.)

They ill become the wretched suppliant
To death devoted.—

(Returning to OSRIC.)

Alwyn, where is he?

I little thought that Alwyn would forsake me.

Osric. Forsake thee? He! the cruel sentence
passed,—

He flung him on the steed prepar'd for thee ;
And, with a madman's desperate course, he sped
To seek thy Egbert.—

Ina. Oh! 'twas rashly done!

Had I but known his purpose, I had sent
Some words of comfort,—of fallacious hope.

Osric, my husband's bosom owns no thought
Mine does not share. We are one heart! one
mind!

And the full tidings of my fate, pour'd forth
With careless haste, will kill him. Oh! I know,
Too well I know, alas! th' impetuous course
Of all his soul's affections!—

Osric. Nay, take comfort.

Haply good Alwyn brings him to thy rescue.

Ina. The distance! *Osric.*—Will the wild
winds lend

Their rushing wings?—

Osric. Forestall not evils, lady.
There's pity still in heaven!

Ina. (*looking out.*) See, my friend!
The last pale lingering light has left the west,
I will prepare me.

Osric. I will wait you, lady. [*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE II.

A Wood. Night.

BALDRED and armed Peasants.

Bal. A thoughtless groom that tends on Alwyn's steeds
Betray'd their course. They will pass through
this wood:

Conceal yourselves, my friends, and be ye sure
The prince escape not. Egbert's death alone
Can save you from the sword of Ethelbald.
Think of your wives, your children, and your
homes.

Hark! I hear distant voices! to your stand.

(*they conceal themselves*)

Enter EGBERT and ALWYN.

Egb. Oh! Alwyn! that my gallant steed should
fail me!

In Ina's rescue fail me!—

Al. Ere he sunk

O'erwearied, he had measur'd half the realm!
My fleetest coursers wait in yonder hamlet,
Conceal'd by darkness and these tangled trees:
Trust me, my lord. I know each knotted oak,
Each bushy dell; and, though the moon refuse
Her friendly beam, can guide your steps aright.

(*The Peasants attack them. EGBERT wards
off their weapons, but does not strike them.*)

Egb. Refrain these ruffian staves! hold, traitors! hold!

I am your prince—your leader—and for you
Have this day stak'd by blood on yonder plains.

Stand off! forbear! I would not take the lives
Of those for whom I fought beneath that sun,
Gone down ere while in crimson blushes wrapt,
To hide him from your deed.—

[*The peasants fall back, then advance again
tumultuously.*]

On your allegiance!

Ingratitude shames mercy from her softness!

(*they fall back again.*)

Mistaken men! what villain set you on?

Not of yourselves—ye men of Wessex!—no—

Not of yourselves,—my countrymen! my friends!

My fellow subjects!—and my fellow soldiers!

Would ye attempt my life. I know you would not,

I trust you ere ye speak.—

(*Peasants fall at his feet.*)

(*Sheathing his sword.*) Who set you on?

Pea. A holy man declar'd you held at nought
Our lives, our fortunes—and he bade us boldly
By one great stroke secure them.—

Eg. “Boldly?” fellow.

Is midnight murder *bold*? oh, shame! away—

'Tis at his *country's foe* the Briton strikes,

And thus secures the blessings ye have nam'd.

Pea. Oh! pardon—generous prince! our lives
are yours.

Egb. (*raising them.*) Away, poor knaves,
away! ye were misled.

I would not have the peering moon betray

Some well-known aspect, and unwilling force me

To do as justice points—I pardon you—

Depart,—nor let me see you till in battle

Ye on your country's foes redeem this deed.

(*As they are going off* BALDRED *steals behind*

EGBERT *with uplifted weapon.* ALWYN
rushing on him and seizing his arm.)

Ha! treacherous villain? no! it cannot be
 A British breast I pierce! die—traitor, die!
(*stabs him.*)

Bald. (*falling.*) Detested Alwyn!—Is it thine
 —to wield—

The threaten'd—bolt—of vengeance!—

Alw. Baldred's voice?

And didst thou wrap thee in the holy seeming
 Of peace and love for this? for secret murder?

Eg. Unhappy Baldred! how had I deserv'd
 Thy deadly hate?—

Bald. As does the sun—himself—
 The hate—of all—heav'n's glittering—host beside,
 And I—like them—would shun—thy hated—
 presence

Wilt—wilt thou—still—embitter—death's last
 pang,

As thou hast poison'd—all—my course—of life.

Eg. Yet live! oh live! accept my friendship,
 Baldred—

My forgiveness!—

Bald. Forgiveness—from the man—I hate?
 Ye demons! save me—from him—save—oh, save
 me! (*dies.*)

Alw. So may th' unerring vengeance of high
 heaven

Still fall on those, who wrest the sacred cause
 To their dark purposes!—

Eg. Oh, Ina! Ina!
 Should this delay prove fatal! on my friend!
(*Exeunt.*)

SCENE III.

The King's Closet.

Cen. (*alone.*) The midnight hour has toll'd! I
 fain would rest.

Sleep flies these aching eyes! Why is it so?

[he ruminates in a disturbed manner.]

It is not much that *one* be sacrific'd
To stay the sword of war. Yet, ere I press
The downy couch, a painful something *here*,
I would compose by my accustom'd prayer.
I never yet have laid me down to rest,
Unoffer'd to high heav'n the past day's deeds.
Why do I seem less ready now to bend
The humble knee? If, for my people's weal,
This woman's death!—'tis well— *[he kneels.]*
Yes I will kneel.

I am alone with thee, my Maker! Thee!
In whose sight all are equal—all thy creatures.

[As he kneels down, INA enters softly behind with her Child, approaches unperceived as he speaks, and kneels beside him.]

Ina. No; I am with thee, in thy Maker's presence!

Like thee, his creature! and, if true thou say'st,
Thy equal in his sight.

Cen. *(with terror.)* Protect me, heaven!

Ha! is it past?—Avaunt! terrific vision!
Com'st thou to charge me with thy blood?

Ina. No, king!

I come to bow me at thy honour'd foot,
And plead for *thee*, that thou wilt spare thyself.
Oh! spare thy age, nor rob it of its staff,
The blameless conscience! Of its graceful honours,

Posterity! and children's children's blessings!

Cen. Thou! thou dost bar me from the joys
thou nam'st.

They will be mine when thou art in the grave.
How did'st thou gain admittance at this hour?
Who aided thee in this!—his life shall pay—

Ina. 'Twas *He*, to whom thou did'st pour forth
the prayer.

He gave to innocence unwonted courage,
And lent my suit the winning grace it needed.
He, whose voice heaves the sea, and stills the
storm—

Bade every cruel passion to subside ;
And, as I pass'd, fashion'd each heart to pity.
The gentle hand, unconscious of its act,
Put back the pond'rous bolt!—With noiseless
sweep

The portal open'd, to admit a mother
Bearing her orphan'd little one, to place him
Beneath a grandsire's care. [*presenting the child.*
Protect this child!

The heir of Wessex' throne!

Cen. I will not look on't.

Away, and take it hence!—It dies with thee.

Ina. Oh! say not so! Murder the rosy babe
That smiles on thee? Thy age's stay and hope!
Thou, who not yet in wantonness of power,
Hast rioted in blood! Not yet hast mock'd
At nature's ties!—and at thy first essay
To crimson thy hard hand with this! thy own!
Nay, tremble, tyrant! tremble in thy turn
Before a frantic mother!—*Thou* a father!
Oh, yes! thou art, and father of a son,
Whose infancy was dear as is this babe's.
Then save my child, and let my life suffice.

[*Clinging to him.*

Cen. Away! nor hang on me. Prepare for
death!

Ina. I am prepar'd to meet death as becomes
me ;

Although 'tis hard to die, so young, so lov'd!
Thy Egbert, too, will find it hard to part.

Cen. The short-liv'd pang will be forgotten soon.

Ina. And was the pang so soon forgot by thee,
To lose thy virtuous queen, my gracious mistress,
Though 'twas by nature's hand matur'd for
 heav'n

By a long life of happiness and love!
Not torn from thee, as must be Egbert's wife,
In spring of bliss, but gently summon'd hence.

Cen. No more of this. Fair Edelfleda's charms,
With whom he weds—

Ina. Oh! never, never, king!
He will not long survive.—Thus Edelfleda
Will be appeas'd, and peace once more restor'd.
Then will this child—Oh, look on him King Ce-
 nolph!

Then will this child remind thee of thy son.
Fear not to look :—he but resembles Egbert.—
He bears no feature of his wretched mother.
His looks will waken none but grateful thoughts
Of all that once was thine in Egbert's worth,
Nor e'er remind thee of the deed of blood
That stain'd thy long reign's close.

Cen. I charge thee, hence!
Was't I who will'd thy death!

Ina. It was myself!
And I am firm to die with honour, rather
Than live with fame attainted. Sigiswold,
My father, died with honour.

Cen. (*starting at the name.*) Sigiswold!

Ina. I am his daughter! and like him I die
For thee, and for thy people.—If his blood,
His faithful blood, that at thy feet flow'd forth,
While thronging subjects hail'd thy rescu'd life!
Have any claim upon a royal heart,
(But, haply, nurs'd in soft prosperity,

A king is not a man that he should pity !)
 Oh ! in my father's name—to thee—my father !
 My Egbert's father, therefore mine, I sue.

Cen. Away, thou syren ! I have sworn thy
 death.

Ina. And I will die content—indeed I will,
 If thou wilt hear thy victim's dying prayer.
 Grant, grant, that I once more behold my hus-
 band !

Oh ! let thy Egbert once more see his child !
 And bless him, once, once more ! Oh ! let me see
 him,

And parting, speak as holy wedded love,
 So rudely sever'd in its youthful prime,
 May prompt. This last, this sad, this little com-
 fort,

Canst thou refuse to her whose father sav'd thee?
 A mother ! and a wife ! whose throbbing breast
 Thy hand so soon will still for ever ?

Cen. (*groans.*) Oh !

Ina. Merciful God ! thou dost wipe off a tear !
 Spite of thyself thou hast a father's heart !

[*eagerly pressing the child towards him.*

Look on thy Egbert's child, and let me hear,
 Ere yet, at day-break, I lay down my life,
 A grandsire's blessing pour'd upon his head !

[*CENULPH snatches the child to his bosom.*

*INA contemplates them with rapture,
 then with trembling anxiety and hope.*

Father ! and shall I see my Egbert too ?

Cen. Yes ! thou shalt see him—nor for thousand
 worlds

Shalt thou be torn from him !

[*embraces her and the child together with
 agonizing emotion—then*

Come Ethelbald !

In all thy terrors, come! I am prepar'd—
I and my children will defy thy rage.

Edred. (behind the scenes.) Nay let me pass. Ye
shall not stay my steps.

Monarchs would wish their slumbers ever broken
By tidings such as these!

(entering) King Cenulph! joy!

Th' invading host no longer threatens thee.
While they advanc'd in insolence and pride,
Dreaming of conquest, as the god of battles
Prince Egbert came:—with skill, his powers di-
viding,

He rush'd upon the foe from every side.
Disorder'd, broken, they but fell on death
Where'er they turned. 'Twas one wide slaugh-
ter all.

Our brooks run crimson to th'affrighted sea!
Our thirsty fallows drink of Mercian blood!
Countless the prisoners!—Ethelbald is taken!

Cen. So ever shall it fare in after ages,
With such as wound, with hostile foot, the bosom
Of this fair isle, by jealous ocean guarded,
The richest gem that sparkles on his breast,
The cradle, and the throne of *Liberty*!

Enter EDELFLÉDA.

Egbert victorious!—Ethelbald in chains!
And is it true? and am I quite undone?

(Seeing CENULPH embrace INA.)

What sight is this that blasts the blessed sense
Of vision? doom'd to death a few hours since,
Feeble old man, by thee and by thy council,
I see her now, clasp'd in thy trembling arms,
While tears of dotage o'er thy eye-balls swell.
Stand I alone in the wide world?—no power
That rules our fates to avenge or to protect me?
Then will I be protector to myself!

My own avenger!—independent—single—
Supreme!—though but in misery and guilt!

(She rushes to stab INA. CENULPH seizes her arms, and the attendants surround her.)

Cen. Guard her, Lord Oswald, with respectful care.—

This frantic act was but the effect of grief.

Ina. Soothe her, my lord. Who shall compassionate

Her soul's distracted state if Ina do not?

Oh! use not harsh constraint, lest she should
feel

Too heavy on her heart her father's chains,—
Her fortune's overthrow.—

Edel. This ruffian grasp!

And think ye, sirs, ye hold some lawless hind
By sordid rapine stain'd?—I am a princess!

A mighty monarch's daughter!—though de-
thron'd—

And sacred still my person!—nay, unhand me.

(they leave her.)

See, I am tranquil, king!—*(To Ina.)* nor trem-
ble thou—

One moment I forgot myself—no more—

But to high heav'n belongs to judge the faults
Of royal souls!—the royal soul itself,

Heaven's best interpreter?—and royal hands
Alone shall execute heav'n's just decree!

(stabs herself.)

Ina. Hold, hold her hand, Lord Oswald!
'tis too late!

What hast thou done?

Edel. To Mercia's wretched princess

I have secur'd an honourable death!—

I could not live degraded!—thou or I—

Must yield!—'tis mine—I will'd it so!—and
now—

(Which Edelfleda had not ask'd and liv'd—)
Thy pardon, Ina!—

Ina. Oh! much-injur'd princess!
Thou pardon rather the unworthy Ina
That happiness it now seems guilt to own!

Edel. These torpid pulses, with—mad passion
throb—
No longer—all—is calm—and cold—tell Eg-
bert—
I—dying—bless'd—your loves!—I pray—you—
both—
Think—kindly—sometimes—kindly—speak—of
me—

Cen. Oh! Edelfleda! rash, unhappy maid!
Thy hand has dash'd from thee exalted good;
The good congenial to thy lofty spirit!
Seated on Mercia's throne, thy soul of love
Had in a people's bliss secur'd thy own.

Edel. No, monarch—no; there is—no bliss—
for one—
Who—loving virtue, but—by passion—driven—
To worst—extremes—can never—never—more
Honour—herself.—Oh! let—the quiet—grave—
Close o'er—my sorrows—and my—faults. That
pang!—
And now—I rest—

[*Dies.*

Ina. Oh! heavens! her soul is fled!

Cen. Poor Edelfleda! Summon her attend-
ants!

Good Bertha, bear her hence; apply each means
If yet a lingering breath of life—

Edred. My Liege,
We fear some ill may have befallen Prince
Egbert.

Cen. Where is he? Comes he not?

Edred. There came a man,
With vizor down. In breathless haste he came;
They spoke apart with gestures violent,
And sudden sped together o'er the plain.

Ina. 'Twas to his heart's dear home my Egbert
sped!

He will be there ere we can reach it, father!

(*She rushes out, CENULPH follows.*)

SCENE LAST.

INA's house.

Enter EGBERT and ALWYN hastily.

Egb. I am here, my love! they shall not tear
thee from me!

Thy husband will defend thee from the world!

My love! my wife! where art thou?

Alw. (*alarmed.*) My good lord,
Strange silence reigns around. They sleep, per-
haps—

The menial train. The night is far advanced.

I pray you rest you here: I will awake them.

Haply thy Ina too—enjoys repose—

For sleep will visit—suffering innocence.

Egb. Haste thee, my friend, and rouse the
drowsy sluggards.

[*Exit ALWYN.*

(*Going to a door.*) This is her chamber. Those
lov'd eyes have wept,

'Till as the infant's they have clos'd in sleep.

I'll enter softly, and will whisper peace;

Till, by degrees, she wake to the full sense

Of all our joy.

(*He enters, and returns.*)

EPILOGUE,

By THOMAS MOORE, Esq.

LAST night, as lonely o'er my fire I sat,
Thinking of cues, starts, exits, and—all that;
And wondering much what little knavish sprite
Had put it first in women's heads to write ;
Sudden I saw—as in some witching dream—
A bright blue Glory round my book-case beam ;
From whose quick-opening folds of azure light,
Out flew a tiny Form, as small and bright
As Puck the Fairy, when he pops his head,
Some sunny morning, from a violet bed :
' Bless me !' (I starting, cried) ' what Imp are you ?'—
' A small He-devil, ma'am—my name, BAS BLEU—
' A bookish Sprite, much giv'n to routs and reading,—
' 'Tis I who teach your spinster of high breeding
' The reigning taste in chemistry and caps,
' The last new bounds of tuckers and of maps ;
' And, when the waltz has twirl'd her giddy brain,
' With metaphysics twirl it back again !'

I view'd him as he spoke—his hose were blue,
His wings—the covers of the last Review—
Cerulean, border'd with a jaundice hue,
And tinsell'd gaily o'er, for evening wear,
Till the next quarter brings a new-fledg'd pair.

EPILOGUE.

‘ Inspir’d by me ! (pursu’d this waggish Fairy)
‘ That best of wives and Sapphos, Lady Mary,
‘ Votary alike of Crispin and the Muse,
‘ Makes her own splay-foot epigrams and shoes.
‘ For *me* the eyes of young Camilla shine,
‘ And mingle love’s blue brilliancies with mine ;
‘ For me she sits apart, from coxcombs shrinking,
‘ Looks wise, the pretty soul ! and *thinks* she’s thinking.
‘ By my advice, Miss Indigo attends
‘ Lectures on Memory, and assures her friends,
‘ ‘ ‘Pon honour ! (*mimicks*) nothing can surpass the plan
‘ ‘ Of that Professor—(*trying to recollect*) psha!—that
‘ ‘ Memory-man,—

‘ ‘ That—what’s his name ?—him I attended lately—
‘ ‘ ‘Pon honour, he improved *my* memory greatly.’—

Here, courtseying low, I ask’d the blue-legg’d sprite
What share he had in this our play to-night ?

‘ Nay, *there,*’ he cried, ‘ there I am guiltless quite ;
‘ What ! chuse a Heroine from that gothic time,
‘ When no one waltz’d, and none but monks could rhyme ;
‘ When lovely Woman, all unschool’d and wild,
‘ Blush’d without art, and without culture smil’d ;
‘ Simple as flowers, while yet *unclass’d* they shone,
‘ Ere Science call’d their brilliant world her own,
‘ Rang’d the wild rosy things in learned Orders,
‘ And fill’d with Greek the garden’s blushing borders !—
‘ No—no—your gentle Inas will not do—
‘ To-morrow evening, when the lights burn blue,
‘ I’ll come—(*pointing downwards*) you understand—till
‘ then, adieu !’

And *has* the Sprite been here ?—no—jest’s apart—
Howe’er man rules in science and in art,
The sphere of woman’s glories is the heart ;
And, if *our* Muse have sketch’d, with pencil true,
The wife—the mother—firm, yet gentle too ;—

EPILOGUE.

Whose soul, wrapp'd up in ties itself hath spun,
Trembles, if touch'd in the remotest one ;—
Who loves,—yet dares ev'n Love himself disown,
When Honour's broken shaft supports his throne ;—
If *such* our Ina, she may scorn the evils,
Dire as they are, of Critics, and—Blue Devils !

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